



Stronger State Laws Result in More Physical Education, but Few States Have Strong Laws

Quick Facts

- The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires school districts participating in federal school meals programs to adopt and implement wellness policies for physical education (PE) and nutrition.¹
- The *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* recommend that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.²

Physical activity in childhood. Physical activity during childhood is associated with participation in physical activity later in life, may reduce the risk of becoming overweight as an adult,³ and may lessen the risk of chronic diseases, such as cancer, later in life.^{4, 5}

Standards for PE. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention School Health Guidelines recommends 150 minutes/week of physical education for elementary school students and 225 minutes/week for middle and high school students.^{6, 7} Although these recommendations exist, the amount of time allocated to physical education in U.S. public schools varies considerably.

State law and PE. Laws established by state legislatures and state agencies set the minimum PE time requirements for districts and public schools. These state laws vary in their scope, stringency, and degree of implementation.

This C.L.A.S.S. brief summarizes a study addressing the following research question:

Do schools in states with **strong laws** for PE time report more time allocated to PE at the elementary, middle, and high school levels than schools in states with weak laws? And, if so, how much more time?

In this nationally representative study of U.S. public schools, states were assigned to one of three groups based on the stringency and specificity of their respective laws for PE time:

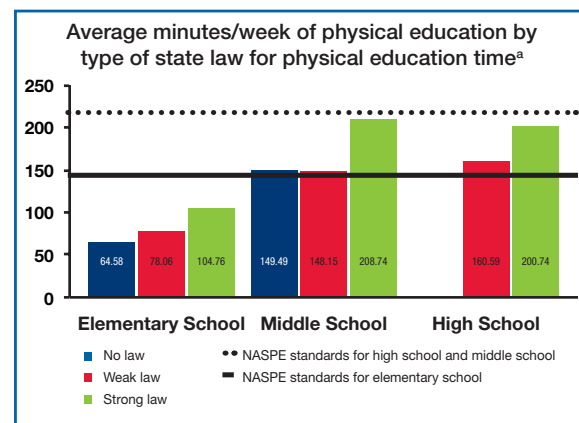
- **No law** = State has no law or no law requiring PE
- **Weak law** = State requires PE but does not specify a minimum time requirement
- **Strong law** = State requires and specifies a minimum time requirement for PE

What did C.L.A.S.S. researchers find?

Key Findings

- Elementary and middle schools in states with strong law averaged 27 and 60 minutes/week more time allocated to PE, respectively, than schools in states with weak law.
- PE time did not differ between states with weak law and states with no law at the elementary and middle school levels.
- Most schools were located in states with weak law, and very few schools met NASPE's standards for PE time.

State law related to PE time. Elementary and middle schools in states with strong law averaged 27 and 60 minutes/week more PE time, respectively, than schools in states with weak law. PE time in states with weak law did not differ statistically from PE time in states with no law. For high school, the amount of PE time did not differ statistically by type of state law.



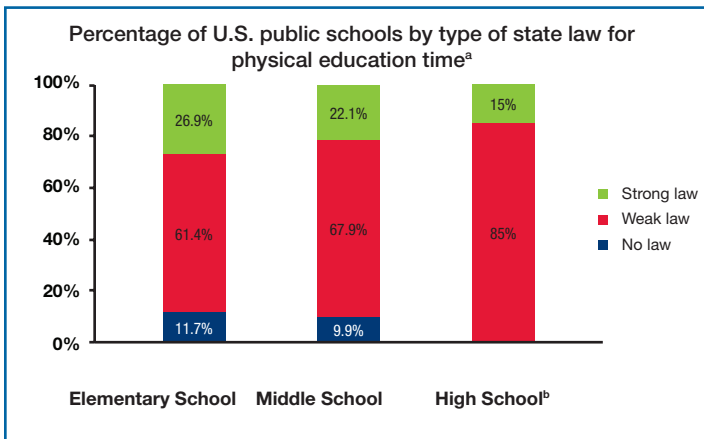
^a For information on statistical significance and to review additional findings, please refer to the source publication, *American Journal of Public Health*, 2012;102; Epub ahead of print. <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300587>.

^b No law and weak law were combined at the high school level because of small sample size for no law.



Classification of Laws Associated with School Students

Distribution of schools by state PE law. Most schools were in states with weak law (61 percent of elementary schools, 68 percent of middle schools, and 85 percent of high schools), whereas few schools were in states with strong law (27 percent of elementary schools, 22 percent of middle schools, and 15 percent of high schools).



a For information on statistical significance and to review additional findings, please refer to the source publication, *American Journal of Public Health*, 2012;102; Epub ahead of print. <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300587>.

b No law and weak law were combined at the high school level because of small sample size for no law.

School characteristics. Among elementary schools, non-urban schools reported 25.3 more minutes/week of PE than urban schools. Among middle schools, high poverty schools reported 35.5 more minutes/week of physical education than low poverty schools.

About C.L.A.S.S.

Classification of Laws Associated with School Students (C.L.A.S.S.) is a scoring system used to monitor and evaluate state-level school physical education and nutrition policies that have been codified into law. C.L.A.S.S. briefs are 1–2 page summaries of publications and analyses of C.L.A.S.S.-related data and informational materials. For more information, go to <http://class.cancer.gov>.

References

For a full summary of the research discussed in this C.L.A.S.S. brief, please refer to the source publication, *Perna FM, Oh A, Chiqui JF, et al. The association of state law to physical education time allocation in US public schools. Am J Public Health. 2012;102; Epub ahead of print, http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300587.*

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2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008.
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5. Moore, SC, Chow, WH, Schatzkin A, et al. Physical activity during adulthood and adolescence in relation to renal cell cancer. *Am J Epidemiol* 2008; 168(2), 149 -57.
6. National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Moving into the future: National standards for physical education (2nd ed.). Reston, VA: McGraw-Hill, 2004.
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Why is this research important?

Independent of school size, setting, and poverty status, findings suggest strong state law for PE time may be more effective than weak or no law in facilitating greater time allocation for PE. Strong law includes both requiring and specifying the minimum amount of PE time.

The Bottom Line

- U.S. schools are allocating less than the recommended amount of PE.
- Strong state law requiring and specifying time requirements for PE may provide one avenue for improving school PE and, ultimately, for promoting physical activity among children.

What are the next steps?

For researchers:

- Continue to assess existing PE laws and local policies and their implementation in schools.

For policymakers:

- Be aware of and promote adherence to national PE standards.
- Consider the adoption of state laws and local policies that have been associated with increased quality and time allotment for PE in schools. (See also the CDC's School Health Guidelines).

For members of the general public:

- Work with local schools and state representatives to implement PE laws with specific requirements. For state-specific profiles of PE laws, visit <http://class.cancer.gov/profiles.aspx>.